

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 270

SP 033 942

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TITLE Preservice Teacher Education at Brock: The Administrative Concerns of a Collaborative Approach.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (San Antonio, TX, February 25-28, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Collegiality; *Cooperative Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Participative Decision Making; Practicums; Preservice Teacher Education; Student Teachers; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Brock University (Canada); Ontario; Reflective Teaching; Reflective Thinking

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a 1-year post-baccalaureate program for preservice teachers at Brock University (Ontario, Canada). The program emphasizes the relationship between course content and what students see and practice during student teaching. There is strong collaboration among faculty, faculty associates, and students. All participants have an essential role. The paper describes coursework requirements which involve observation in public school classes and significant amounts of group discussion and collaborative planning. The program is based on the belief that for students to truly understand effective teaching, they must actively observe others teach, engage in dialogues about teaching, and reflect on their own teaching and that of others. Faculty members actively observe students during their practicum placements and meet with associates to discuss the students and the program. Associates model an activity-based, student-centered program. Brock employs retired personnel who have demonstrated successful teaching and part-time individuals recognized by their boards as leaders in instructional delivery. They obtain full-time teachers by reimbursing boards for substitute teachers required for the time the teachers spend in direct involvement with the program. The program requires collaboration between faculty, students, and the field and a good understanding of each other's roles. From an administrative perspective, the collaboration can be labor intensive, time consuming, and frustrating, but Brock University has largely overcome the problems. (SM)

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THE ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS OF A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

by

Don Dworet

Paper presented at the
Annual Meeting of the
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
San Antonio, Texas, February 25-28, 1992

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Preservice Teacher Education at Brock

The Administrative Concerns of a Collaborative Approach

The province of Ontario graduates approximately 6000 teachers a year from its ten Faculties of Education. Over 5000 of these graduates participate in a one year post-baccalaureate preservice program focussing on either primary/junior (grades K-6), junior/intermediate (grades 4-10) or intermediate/senior (7- 12+) certification requirements. In every case the one year is divided between university course work and practice teaching experiences. Since we only have one academic year, it is imperative that the limited time available for professional teacher education be used in the most productive manner.

The faculty at Brock believes that there must be a relationship between the content of students' courses and what the students see and practice during their practice teaching experiences. Instructors must ensure that course content has some bases in reality and that faculty associates (associate teachers) must also be aware that faculties cannot, in the limited time available, teach "everything" and, that as associates, they must take on responsibility for instructing the student teacher in certain deficient areas. This understanding among the stakeholders responsible for teacher education is essential if the student is to obtain maximum benefit of his/her teacher education year.

This blending of faculty/school programming does not come easily and must rely on strong collaboration among faculty, faculty associates and students in order for the model to be successful. All individuals in the Brock program have an essential role to play in the teacher education process, and all must know their role, understand the other's role and ensure that mutual support and respect are provided. Though we have not reached the point suggested by Levin (1990) that "in order to train prospective and practising teachers more effectively and efficiently, we must conceive the task as the responsibility of the education establishment as a whole- both public schools and universities" have developed a model that is moving in that direction and that relies heavily on collaboration among all the stakeholders.

Overall Structure

The Brock program has a number of distinct elements to it. In the elementary panel, these operate in an on-going manner during the course work section of our program:

Methods Course and Thematic Approach

On Mondays, all students in the program receive an input lecture on an aspect of classroom instruction (see appendix A for the list of topics). This topic is then the "umbrella" topic for the week and is discussed in other courses that the student proceeds to on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

On most Wednesdays, students are off campus observing in the actual class where they will be doing their upcoming practice teaching. The focus of observation is related to the weekly topic, with the students observing and making note of how the topic is operationalized by their particular faculty associate.

On Thursdays, in addition to other classes, students attend a designated "Counselling group" session. This represents a group of twenty-five students who, with two faculty members, discuss the weekly topic, partake in a student led seminar on that topic and further discuss what was observed in their classrooms. The two faculty must be aware of what was presented on Monday and be prepared to address the topic further. This requires all faculty to communicate with one another regardless of their discipline or area of expertise.

Finally on Fridays, each counselling group and the two assigned faculty meet off-campus in a local school for what we refer to as a "teaching centre". During this period, students teach a lesson, which is videotaped and then they partake in a whole group discussion of the lesson, which focuses as much as possible on the weekly topic. Though this microteaching experience is demanding and anxiety ridden for the student, the ensuing discussion is one of the most exciting aspects of our program.

The collaborative aspect of the above model is evident. To begin, the thematic approach requires that the faculty understand what was taught on the major methods input session each Monday. Since they are certainly not expected to agree with the methods instructor, faculty are free to add their own ideas to what was already provided. For this to work successfully however, faculty must know what each is saying, know when they do disagree and then allow and encourage the students to take the information and arrive at their own conclusion regarding teaching.

Students must work together in a counselling group in order to lead effective seminars, assist each other in practice teaching tasks, support one another during the emotional stress of a very demanding program and provide constructive information to each other about what they see in schools and what they admire and dislike about the actual educational experience. Dialogue is encouraged, debate is frequent. Hopefully students learn as much from each other as they do from the faculty.

During the Friday sessions collaboration is also essential. The student, in preparing the lesson, must meet with the teacher who will provide the pupils, discuss with her/him what should be taught and perhaps how it should be taught. The teacher is free to provide whatever assistance is necessary. Students must observe the lesson, discuss what they thought was appropriate, offer alternative instructional strategies and where the lesson could have been enhanced. The faculty must provide input that promotes appropriate instructional practices and illustrates where theory has met practice.

We contend that this model operationalizes the suggestion of Arends (1991) that for students "to truly understand what effective teaching is all about, students must actively observe others teach, must engage in dialogues about teaching and must reflect on both their own teaching experiences and those of others (p. xviii). It is hoped that through the Counselling group arrangement, the teaching centre and the common module topics that students get ample opportunity to observe, discuss and analyze the elements of teaching.

Contact With the Field

Combined with this 'in-house' program is the reaching out to faculty associates in order for them to fully understand their role in the teacher education process. Our faculty actively observes students during each of their practicum placements and frequently meets with associates to not only discuss the student but also our program. Over time, since faculty work with one school board they become well acquainted with school personnel and they maintain an ongoing dialogue with teachers, principals and superintendents in order to make our program current and meaningful.

In the past two years, however, we have attempted to make this contact broader and more formal. Faculty are encouraged to hold Associate In-service sessions whereby all associates are brought together to learn about our program, students and program expectations. Counselling skills, observation and evaluation skills and report writing are all discussed. It is through this mechanism that we hope associates will come to understand what we have to offer and how the practicum experience enhances our program. By working closely with faculty associates we hope to break down the "wall" which appears to exist between university instruction and student teaching. We hope our associates do not suggest to our students that they "forget" what they learn in Teachers' College, but that what they learn here is demonstrated by the associate in the classroom.

It is also important to us that Associates model the type of instruction which Brock emphasizes: an activity-based, student centred program. We are trying to work collaboratively with principals, consultants and other board personnel to ensure that those teachers referred to us to act as associates have classrooms which model this approach. We also ask that these teachers have good interpersonal skills which are appropriate to working with an adult learner.

Brock faculty believe that to deliver this model effectively we need the extensive involvement of field-based personnel. We accomplish this in four separate ways: 1) employing retired personnel who have demonstrated many years of successful teaching and/or administrative work in schools, 2) employing individuals, recognized by their boards as leaders in instructional delivery and curriculum implementation, for a limited period of time, 3) obtaining full time teachers to teach on our program by reimbursing boards for the substitute teachers required or paying an appropriate percentage of the teachers salary for the time they spend involved with our program. The active collaboration with these individuals helps insure that our program is appropriate and relevant for today's classrooms.

In summary, the Brock models require excellent collaboration among faculty, students and the field. Only through a good understanding of each other's roles could our program be successful. Each participant must be fully involved, able and willing to assist. Each participant must respect the role of the other, be able to speak out on issues of concern and be aware that all involved have a common goal - to ensure that those entering the teacher profession are amply qualified to do so.

Administrative Concerns

Having outlined the Brock model it is important to note that from an administrative perspective collaboration of this type is labour intensive, time consuming and often very frustrating. Each of these issues warrants discussion.

Labour intensive

Traditionally, in most education faculties, faculty teach courses which are conducted approximately three hours per week for twelve to fifteen weeks. Placement and supervision of student-teachers is done by a centralized office independent of course instructors. Often students may be observed and evaluated by faculty who they have never seen before and frequently they are not observed by university faculty at all. As our model relies on instructors who have developed a strong relationship with their students, understand the current demands of classroom practice and are easily welcomed into classrooms, the emphasis on faculty involvement in student teacher observation is evident. This takes away time from research, an item of strong concern on university campuses. The administrative (Department Chair) role here, however, is to emphasize the need for university involvement in the observation process and advocate for its continued importance. It ensures that lectures are appropriate, that the observer is detached from the board or school involved, allowing for a more objective evaluation and that the faculty member can act as a "sounding board" for a student who may be critical of class, school or board practices.

The teaching centre also takes considerable time and organization but it is believed by our faculty and by teachers who understand the approach to be a most valuable experience. The discussions following an observed lesson relate to incidents which are not hypothetical but which actually occurred. Alternative approaches to the same content are offered and as the students gain more confidence their observational and reflective skills increase. They not only have an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching but have an opportunity to collectively reflect on a commonly observed lesson. This cannot be done successfully without the students collaborating with each other in a mutually supportive fashion along with faculty who are also supportive of their students. Without this support comments following a teaching centre lesson could be devastating. Fortunately, this does not occur. Faculty and students are seen as colleagues who are there to help. Unfortunately this takes time and effort of a nature which is not recognized by the university community. Another benefit of the Teaching Centre is the on-site principal

who frequently is invited to speak to counselling groups about teaching. This allows for field personnel to better understand our students and for students to get better understanding of the field.

University senior administration must be made aware of the benefits of this approach and encouraged to respond accordingly. Funds must be allocated for travel, honorariums for school staffs and equipment, all necessary for off campus teaching to occur successfully.

As can be seen above, the allotted workload provided faculty for counselling group responsibility must be substantial. Additionally since our counselling group allows for two counsellors for each group and our full-time faculty complement is not large enough to cover this, many part-time personnel must be employed to act as counsellors. Though this is certainly positive when we are able to employ retired teachers, principals or superintendents who give us a very vital link to the field, it is not done without incurring considerable expense.

Time consuming

In order for this model to be most effective and truly collaborative frequent interaction of both a formal and informal nature must occur between and among university faculty and field personnel. Often the formal interaction takes place in a jointly sponsored Faculty Associate In-service session. During these sessions all Associates are invited to an in-service session where our program is discussed, evaluation and counselling ideas are presented and discussions over the role of being a faculty associate takes place. Most often these sessions take place after school hours. As we work with eleven boards of education, eleven sessions of this type take place-organized by faculty in cooperation with the appropriate school board. Logistical arrangements, obtaining space, ordering food, sending out invitations are just some of the tasks which must be undertaken so that a well-organized appropriate in-service session can be conducted. This is a very time consuming task demanding much faculty attention in order to be done adequately. It is our belief, however, that these efforts must be expended if faculty associates are to truly be perceived as partners in our program. These in-service sessions allow them to understand our program and tell us what they think. They come to better understand both our students and their role in the teacher education process.

The informal interaction takes place during the placing and observing of student-teachers. As indicated earlier this is done by the faculty counsellors who contact schools, speak with principals and visit each student at least once during each practice teaching block. Over time, counsellors get to be very well known by teachers and administrators. When they visit a school they often spend extra time talking to the staff about teacher education and our program. It is hoped that this informal interaction assists the field in speaking out on issues important to them regarding teacher education and thus letting us know when they believe change is necessary. This informal 'collaboration' helps break down the ivory tower wall and helps both the field and university personnel understand one another. Unfortunately these frequent meetings before and after observations (already a time consuming item) take up much of a faculty member's time.

Additionally, our faculty have a variety of departmental and counsellor's meeting designed to ensure that everyone knows what everyone else is doing. Though this may be seen as an infringement of academic freedom it is my belief that it is not. Faculty are free to deviate from the "normal" model but it is expected that this deviation be acknowledged to the students and must ensure that all department, university and Ministry of Education requirements are followed. Fortunately, this does not happen often. Our faculty are supportive of the Brock model and more often than not, there is consistency in approach and evaluation. Unfortunately obtaining this consistency depends on attendance at meetings, frequent communication and an open door. This type of activity also takes up much time but is necessary to maintain the ongoing collaboration. Students having difficulty are discussed at department meetings and all involved work together in order to be of assistance. A student's success or failure is not the decision of one faculty member but is the determination of his/her counsellors, instructors and department administration. Here again, several individuals must work together in order to reach an evaluative decision that is appropriate and defensible.

In addition to the faculty time taken for collaboration, administrative time is spent negotiating with school boards for the use of their personnel on our program. Each board has their own policies for reimbursement and place limits on the amount of time a teacher can offer to our program. Frequently boards will not agree to more than a one year commitment, requiring us to search for new people each year, just after someone has come to understand what we are doing and how our courses "fit" together.

Frustrating

Our intent is to encourage the field to provide input into the development of our students. We invite them to in-service sessions, discuss whenever possible what our program should be, and get the field to understand that our model is classroom based designed to make maximum use of the time we have with our students. Unfortunately it is often very frustrating for faculty when in-service sessions are not well-attended, when a student is placed with a less than adequate teacher because the principal thought it would do the teacher some good or when a teacher tells a student to forget everything they learned in Teachers' College. It appears that teacher education has a very negative image and despite efforts to improve our image, faculty of education are not a high priority item for teachers or principals and often much of what we try to do well is contradicted by the words or actions of field personnel.

It is also the belief of our faculty to conduct this model successfully we need individuals who have strong backgrounds in teaching to work with us on a full-time basis. Frequently these same individuals do not have the academic credentials normally required of university faculty and therefore are not able to obtain tenure no matter how strong their knowledge of classroom instruction and/or curriculum may be. Additionally salary differentials between field personnel and university are substantial - with most strong field personnel having to take a reduced salary in order to accept a low ranked position in the university. This is a contentious issue and there is no doubt that many prospective teachers are missing the opportunity to interact with

exemplary professionals due to the university's unwillingness to modify its tenure and promotions expectations. We need the university to recognize the accomplishments of the highly regarded professional teacher and encourage their continued involvement in preservice education by devising alternative criteria for the hiring and maintaining of these individuals on a teacher education faculty. Only by doing so, can continued active collaboration be maintained.

Summary

The Brock Faculty of Education model for preservice teacher education requires collaboration at a number of levels. As a result, however, some administrative problems are encountered by this approach. Fortunately, these problems have largely been overcome and the model has been firmly established.

It should be pointed out that the model described above represents the post-baccalaureate model which as indicated at the beginning of this paper is the most common Ontario model. Brock does have, however, two other models, both involving collaborative efforts. The first involves a four year combined program leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Child Studies and a Bachelor of Education (grade K-6 certification) accomplished concurrently over a four year time span. This program was developed jointly between the faculty of Education and faculty from Psychology, and Sociology. The second program, only three years old, is a combined degree (B.Sc. and B.Ed) in mathematics or Science for individuals wishing to teach grades 4-10. This was also jointly developed and the director, a faculty member from the department of Biological Sciences, has been cross appointed to the faculty of Education.

Brock has come to a point where deviations from this model, such as those indicated above, are encouraged as long as they maintain the basic structure and reliance on collaboration. Smith, Scott et al. (1989), speaking of public schools, suggest that collaboration is a voluntary effort and depends on a belief that effective instruction can only be accomplished in a collaborative setting. This statement is also true for those working at the university level.

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